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THE JEW IN AMERICA.

BY PROFESSOR ABRAM S. ISAACS.

THE buoyancy and vitality of the Jewish people and their religion have stood the test of a long series of migrations from early Biblical times to the present exodus from Russia and Rumania. Sudden and violent changes which have sounded the death-knell of many races and religions, or have fused and cross-fertilized them beyond recognition, seem only to have vitalized the Jew. As his faith was to be universalized, so his people were to be scattered from land to land, from East to West,—the divine method of preventing any relapse into the Bedouin stage of development, with Judaism, not tribalism, his religion.

Such migrations of varying magnitude in the past, from Palestine to Babylonia, Persia, Egypt, and Asia Minor; from the Orient to Italy, Spain, and Central Europe, have occurred at critical periods, and were rarely voluntary but usually compulsory. There was generally no alternative between exile and death, apostasy and degradation. Then, as now, the Jew preferred the pilgrim's staff, the wanderer among the nations; and whether by the Guadalquivir or the Danube, in the dense forests of Germany, or in the fertile plains of Italy, the people remained on the whole faithful to their traditions. Bible and Talmud kept them from becoming Gipsies. Wherever they breathed the atmosphere of comparative freedom, they adapted themselves so thoroughly to each new environment that they added many a brilliant name to the science, philosophy, poetry and statecraft of their day. And, glad at heart, they cherished the older prophets' dream of a golden age of peace and brotherhood for mankind—a dream which was never wholly shattered even in the agonies of an *auto da fé*.

It is now 250 years since the beginnings of what is likely to

prove the most momentous migration in Jewish history occurred on American soil. It is not surprising that such an event should have suggested the idea of a general celebration among the Jews of the United States. But, properly to understand the real significance of the first Jewish arrivals at New Amsterdam towards the end of 1654, it is necessary to consider the causes that led to their settlement and the circumstances which made it absolutely imperative for the Jew to seek a new home and a new opportunity. When the Old World offered no hope and little security or permanency, a New World was at hand for him and all who demand liberty as the first condition of existence.

On August 2nd, 1492, the great majority of the Jews of Spain were expelled, and after a brief stay in Portugal were scattered like criminals and outcasts among the nations. The act of expulsion was the culmination of a series of oppressions which ended their golden era in Spain in a night of unexampled horror. Turkey, Palestine, Venice, Poland, and Holland received the fugitives, who were long to feel the hand of their enemies even in apparent security. Thousands, however, still remained in Spain and Portugal who continued at heart Jews and secretly observed their ancestral customs, although outwardly they were good Catholics and leaders in church and state.

A day after the exile from Spain—one of those curious coincidences which occur so frequently in history as to be termed “providential”—Columbus set sail from Palos on his first eventful voyage. The close connection between the Jews and the discovery of America has now fairly been proved. It is known that several men of Jewish birth accompanied the Genoese, among them Luis de Torres, his interpreter; while his Jewish patron, Santangel, received from Columbus the first account of his discovery. Not only did astronomical works and scientific instruments prepared by Jews assist him greatly, but it was men of Jewish descent who finally succeeded in securing for him Queen Isabella's favor. In addition, the confiscated property of the unfortunate Jews was utilized for the expenses of the second voyage of Columbus. It was only historic justice, therefore, that America in later centuries should prove a welcome abiding-place for the Jewish people, and that the very steps which Spain took for their extermination should have paved the way for their signal prosperity—not the first time in history that an old-fashioned Biblical

sentence should have been verified, nor the first weapon forged against the Jew which has failed to achieve its purpose.

The first Jewish settler on North-American soil, whose name has been preserved, arrived at New Amsterdam on July 8th, 1654, followed later in the same year by a storm-tossed party of twenty-three, presumably from Brazil, which country had shared with Mexico, Peru, Surinam, and the West Indies in the era of colonial expansion after the discovery of America. Brazil, however, had proved an undesirable home after the Portuguese had wrested it in 1654 from the Dutch, and allowed the spirit of the Inquisition full sway. Many of their residents returned to Holland or set sail for the French settlements and elsewhere in the West Indies; but others turned hopefully to New Amsterdam, which, with its Dutch masters, gave promise of happier days. How Peter Stuyvesant received them harshly, how he threatened their exclusion, how the Dutch West India Company directed him to grant them liberty to remain and trade, how gradually they grew in numbers and importance, how they obtained under English rule a larger share of civil and religious freedom and were, with some exceptions, stout patriots in 1776, closing their synagogue when the British held New York,—these incidents form but the introductory chapter to the development of the community after 1812, when it began to furnish noteworthy names in the professions, in finance and trade. The list was largely increased with the decades before and after the Civil War, when its synagogues and benevolent institutions assumed statelier proportions. Hither came, in swift succession, all branches of the Jewish stock from the West Indies, Germany, Poland, Hungary, Rumania, and Russia, until now the small band of luckless refugees who had to endure a full measure of Stuyvesant's wrath in 1654 have grown into a population of half a million and more and are a vital factor in New York's greatness.

The Jews were not slow to settle in other parts of the United States. In 1655, some went to Newport, Rhode Island, from New Amsterdam, to seek a more genial atmosphere; and their numbers were increased by the friendly attitude of Roger Williams's commonwealth. A century later, the community was to become the most prosperous in the land, with merchants of standing who made Newport the commercial capital years before New York assumed that dignity. The Touro synagogue and cemetery, the

Lopez wharf, are reminders of old-time Jewish prominence and leadership in lines of industry. Philadelphia traces its earliest Jewish settler to 1703; its community kept pace with the general growth and supplied its quota of eminent names in science, education and philanthropy.

In the South, the Jewish pioneers came early. They reached Georgia soon after Oglethorpe had founded the colony and were admitted as settlers in 1733. Like their brethren in New York and Philadelphia, they were resolute patriots in the Revolution; while, in South Carolina, Francis Salvador died too early to participate in the struggle, but was of the same patriotic type as Haym Salomon, who so powerfully aided in maintaining the Republic's credit, and upon whose favor James Madison called himself a pensioner; G. M. Seixas, the "patriot minister" of New York; Barnard and Michael Gratz of Philadelphia, stanch in their patriotism; and others of their calibre who rallied in defence of American freedom.

The energy, persistence, and public spirit which marked the Jewish pioneers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when they participated in the activities of colonial times and contributed their share in the early decades of the Republic, were similarly displayed by their successors in the nineteenth century. They were among the settlers when the Ohio Valley was to be changed into busy cities and when Texas, California and Oregon were to be admitted to Statehood. In the early development of Texas they took part in comparatively large numbers, both in the field and the halls of legislation, and Galveston recalls some of them in grateful memory. Among the eager gold-seekers in California, not many years passed before they became prominent in law, medicine, art, finance and trade; while the Alaska seal-fisheries and mineral resources, the coal-fields of the Northwest and Canada, were to a great extent developed by the genius for enterprise of the California Jews. Perhaps in no single State in so short a time can so many notable names be mentioned in varied lines of usefulness. A similar activity was shown in Oregon, where, despite the limited Jewish population, national and State positions have been filled by the pioneers and their successors.

From this necessarily brief summary one fact is clear—that the genial American atmosphere, in which all creeds and na-

tionalities so wondrously flourish, has been distinctly favorable to the Jew's advancement. Think how the Roman Catholics, and Baptists, and Methodists have gained in numbers, wealth, and prestige on American soil in the past hundred years. Such conditions, however, are peculiarly stimulating to the Israelite, who is only emerging from practical serfdom and repression in nearly every land, and who now, for the first time in centuries on so large a scale, is enabled to show his versatility, strength, ability, and character. He is practically unlimited in ambition and scope—with every profession and pursuit open to him. He is thus completely identified with his American environment, differing in no way from his non-Jewish neighbor, save in religious belief. He resents being singled out as peculiar or un-American, if thereby it is inferred that he is an alien. Judaism is as much at home in America as is Christianity; it is neither an anachronism nor a fossil.

What are the Jew's lines of occupation? He is active in business; he succeeds or fails according to his abilities. He enters every profession, is architect as well as plumber, is machinist, inventor, engineer, as well as merchant, lawyer, broker, pedler, drummer, or wage-earner in the sweat-shops. He can own mines or build theatres, run a ranch or a hotel. He can graduate from West Point or Annapolis, be painter or sculptor, financier or steamboat captain, motorman or policeman, steeple-jack or street-musician. He is emphatically no multi-millionaire, as some Baptists are, nor can it be said of him, as was stated a few years ago of Presbyterians, that sixteen prominent bank and trust company presidents in New York city were of that church and in good standing. His wealth is absurdly overrated: doubtless the proverb "as rich as a Jew" has much to answer for. Great masses of his people, not recent accessions exclusively, live from hand to mouth. A glance at the records of Jewish charitable societies in the large cities would show how widespread is Jewish poverty. He has his millionaires, it is true, in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, San Francisco, but the number is very limited. Moderate fortunes, due to thrift and enterprise, are more common; but even these are not so numerous as is popularly supposed. It was easier to disprove the notion that heretics had tails than that all Jews are rich.

What have been the Jew's contributions to the United States?

The United States receives various benefits from the creeds and classes that seek its shores; it is influenced by all in varied fashion, from the days of the Pilgrim Fathers in New England to the era of Italian and Russian immigration at New York. What characteristics have been most promising in the Jew's record of 250 years? What traits most positive for good?

First, his spirit of enterprise. It is this quality which placed him among the pioneers in the East and West, as trader and producer, developing new lines of industry or perfecting the old, and adding immensely to the aggregate of America's wealth. Ambitious, persistent, and undaunted by circumstance, he developed from small beginnings to attain remarkable success. Restless ambition spurred him to fresh endeavor until the goal was reached and fortune won. Hardly a town in the United States but bears witness to his activity, particularly in lines which are capable of wide extension. He has developed the little notions-counter into the department store, for example, with a completeness that would have been incredible a few decades ago.

Second, his breadth of view. The representative American Jew is never a bigot—he respects his neighbor's faith and usually gives to charities without distinction of creed, in the spirit of Adolph Hallgarten, whose bequests to institutions of various creeds included our colored brethren. He is quick to meet his neighbor on common ground, so broadening in our time; and on Thanksgiving Day and other occasions he is glad to welcome his Christian brother to his pulpit. In periods of stress, as in the Paterson fire of 1902, the synagogue is opened cordially to the church without thought of payment, even for an occupancy of several years. He recognizes his new environment and has outgrown the Ghetto point of view, at whatever cost to cherished traditions. He is quick to adopt in education and charity the best modern methods, and joins cheerfully in movements for social reform and civic progress. Judaism is to him a broad universalism, which demands active participation in the life of the day—a looking forward and not backward.

Third, his patriotism. The Jew is intensely an American. His patriotism is almost a religion. His pride in the Republic is unsurpassed. The flag-drill seen at its best among the thousand children of recently arrived emigrants from Russia at the Educational Alliance, New York, is strikingly characteristic. Even as

children, they are taught to revere "One Country, One Flag!" It is not merely out of gratitude that the Jew reveres America as his native or adopted land—his feeling springs as well from the consciousness that only where civil and religious liberty is assured can the Jew call any land his own. Hence his children love to sing the hymn "America," although, as in the case of recent immigrants in general, it is not a "land where our fathers died." The Jew ceases to be a Pole, a German, a Russian, after the first generation has graduated from the public schools—he becomes an American. This sentiment accounts for the large number that volunteered in the Spanish War, whether as rough-riders or ordinary soldiers and seamen. He fought as bravely for the South as for the Union in the Civil War. He took part in the Revolution and the War of 1812.

But his most valuable trait is his love of education. The spirit that moves a poor pedler in a New York Jewish quarter to study Kant's philosophy while on his rounds, or to read in faithful translation Herbert Spencer or Darwin, is peculiar to the Jew and proves his moral superiority though his garments be torn and his occupation lowly. The same spirit impels the poorest to send his children to the public school and to aid them at great personal sacrifice to study for the learned professions; for he knows that education is the most enduring wealth he can bequeath. That Jewish students at school and college are among the most successful is the general testimony of teachers in every city; and, apart from natural aptitude, their high standing is due to the interest evinced by their parents and the value assigned to education. It is suggestive to note that attention is being paid more and more to manual and technical training, with some good effort in the direction of agricultural pursuits. There is little doubt that the study of the Talmud for ten centuries and more has done much to develop his brain-fibre and make almost innate a love of learning which neither poverty nor privation can weaken, and which prosperity—that ruthless solvent of old-fashioned virtues—cannot wholly destroy. It is encouraging to note the same spirit among the wealthier element, an increasing number of whose sons are turning from trade and entering the learned professions, where pecuniary advantages are least regarded.

With positive qualities for good, then, and the list is not exhausted, and with such an honorable record for the past 250 years,

what of the future of the Jews of the United States? Is there no rift within the lute, no shadow on the dial, no reverse side to the mirror which exhibits so many admirable qualities?

The rapid increase in the Jewish population, due chiefly to emigration from Russia since 1881, has furnished a problem of considerable magnitude, which has severely taxed the energies of their American brethren. Yet the burden has been patiently and cheerfully borne and the solution is satisfactorily taking place without friction or annoyance. Save in overcrowded city centres, where foreign nationalities fasten root and thrive, the newcomers offer no problem at all and are proving an energetic and Americanized element of the people. They are spreading out in all directions, entering the various lines of trade and manufacture, and the more effectively they are distributed throughout the country, with many of them taking to the soil, they cease to be a subject of special concern. The diverse elements in American Jewry offer precisely the same difficulties as are presented by diverse elements in the general population and need arouse no greater apprehension. Unification is slow but sure in both instances, and one must patiently await results which cannot be hastened. What clouds, then, the future?

It is often said that certain tendencies in American thought are sapping the bulwarks of supernaturalism and thereby endangering vital Christian dogmas and doctrines. The peril to Judaism is less in a wave of agnostic or sceptical thought than in actual conditions of life and environment, which make Judaism almost impossible without a radical readjustment either of conditions or of Judaism. It is admittedly more and more difficult to maintain olden customs and observances which were deemed inviolable a few decades ago; and, if the destructive process continues much further, what will be left of Judaism to be transmitted to the future? A very minute and unrecognizable quantity, indeed. The Jewish Sabbath is practically disregarded. Home ceremonials, which have so magically promoted family love and unity, have almost wholly vanished. If American liberty spells for the American Israelite disloyalty to his religion, it is not an unmixed blessing. There are many Israelites by birth, too, who never attend synagogue, refuse to associate with Jewry, and court Christian society as evidence of a superior culture and refinement,—some, but only a few of the first genera-

tion, submitting to baptism. Intermarriage is on the increase undoubtedly; few families are entirely free from what has always been regarded by the Jew as a bar sinister, not from any intolerance, but simply because, if it is a natural solution of the Jewish question, it means also an inevitable dissolution of the Jew.

Now, it is possible to take too seriously these departures from the normal, these examples of desertion and disloyalty; for they are no new phenomena and have always existed, accounting partly for the world's small Jewish population. It is only the remnant that has been preserved, to maintain the faith in every era and to spring to new life and activity after each exodus or captivity. The same truth will be exemplified in the United States. There are, however, none the less hopeful signs that indicate a desire for restoration and upbuilding, and a resolution to be loyal to old-time standards. An increased impetus has been given to the training of rabbis; a publication society is doing excellent work; circuit preaching is organizing new communities in the West; the women are banded together for helpful educational effort; while recent immigration has brought to our shores some men of learning and religious enthusiasm, who will prove useful in restraining further inroads of American tidal-waves, if they are ever to be restrained. American Jewish leaders, too, while apparently lacking in qualities of statesmanship, are alive to present dangers. No *laissez-faire* policy can cope with disorganizing elements that have gained such headway. To avert a catastrophe, the Jew must return to Judaism and its essentials; and his leaders must bend every nerve to reconcile American conditions with Jewish traditions. Adaptation is possible without surrender; and the genius of the Jewish people which has withstood an almost continuous crucifixion of nearly 2,000 years is not likely to yield to Yankee notions and American expansion. It will prove, however, an interesting and spirited struggle between forces that resist and forces that invite amalgamation and dissolution. Much ballast and many barnacles from European, Asiatic, and African eras of history will have to be cast away. It is needless to be apprehensive about the next 250 years of American Israel. The remnant will survive and what is vital and essential in Judaism, and not accidental or Occidental merely, will have awakened to renewed and blessed activity.

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